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A Goat and a Valentine

Instead of a Nuisance, Billy Becomes a Prime Favorite

By MARION C. ENRIGHT
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Drusilla Fowler detested the Franklins' pet goat, for it had all but devastated her small domain during the summer. Flower beds had been trampled, shrubs uprooted, and, as for the little kitchen garden near the orchard, the succulent heads of lettuce and later the hard cabbage balls and fallen victims to the insatiable appetite of Billy the goat.

Of course the Franklins were very sorry about it and tried to confine Billy within a hastily constructed fence, but that sagacious and resourceful animal had viewed the structure of wood and wire with a contemptuous eye before he utterly demolished it and resumed his invasion of Drusilla's garden. Drusilla hated him, and the Franklins loved him.

This crisp February morning Drusilla came to the glass door that led from her sitting room into the south porch, and, standing there bathed in the sunlight, she planned her garden for the coming year.

Now, Drusilla in her mind's eye could see the beds blooming once more with roses and pink and sweet williams, phlox and marigolds and magnonette, while the baffled Billy peered through the pallings.

Little Beesie Franklin ran through her own yard waving an envelope frantically. "Oh, mother," Drusilla heard her shout, "somebody has sent me a valentine!"

So this was St. Valentine's day. Drusilla's red lips pressed into a thin red line as she remembered that there was one other thing in the world she detested as heartily as she did the goat Billy, and that was St. Valentine's day. The hot color flew to her cheeks as she recalled events which had happened ten years before and which had thereafter made that anniversary a detestable day.

She had not been engaged to Gregory Ware, but on the 13th of February,

Gregory had said to her that there was something to be settled between them. "You'll know tomorrow, Drusilla, and you'll believe what you get, won't you?" he had whispered in an agony of embarrassment, for Gregory was the shiest man in the world.

And Drusilla had guessed that he was to confess his love in a valentine, and she was radiant with happiness, for she would joyfully believe anything he might say to her in the tender missive. So she had told him shyly that she would see what it said and so put him off while her heart was beating wildly.

Then the next day had come, and there was no valentine, and the next and the next, and it had never come. Drusilla had grown very stiff and hurt, and Gregory had never come to ask an explanation, and after awhile he went away to another village and found work there, and Little River saw him only occasionally and Drusilla not at all.

So Drusilla always avoided going to the postoffice on Valentine's day, that she might evade even the appearance of being interested in the anniversary of the good saint. But today—and she frowned as she recollected it—there was a matter of sending a money order to the city that must be attended to, for an impecunious cousin had written and asked for a loan to tide over a financial difficulty. Drusilla Fowler was not a shirker where duty presented itself, and so she swallowed her repugnance and buttoned herself into a thick warm cloak and plumed on her most becoming hat, for Drusilla had pride in her appearance.

Her adventures began from the very moment she passed out of her own yard into the street. The Franklins' goat was hungrily browsing on the privet hedge that surrounded his master's yard, and as he turned his little evil eye on Drusilla she involuntarily uttered a vicious little "Scat!"

Billy wheeled about on the pivot of his hind legs, reared himself menacingly, dropped his head and made one dive after Drusilla Fowler. But she had gone. With the speed of an antelope she had picked up the skirts of her long cloak and darted down the street, the angry goat leaping after her with increasingly swift gait.

Men dashed to head him off and dodged his threatening horns; women screamed and took to the opposite side of the street; children scattered the chalk until there only remained on the long street the flying red cloak of Drusilla Fowler and the plunging gray-coated Billy after her.

The first building into which she might safely turn was the postoffice. It stood at the corner of the main street and the road that ran to the river. The doors were usually wide open even in this wintry weather, and there would be friendly hands to help her in and to close the portals against the invasion of Billy. Once she glanced behind and saw his waving gray whiskers and the glitter of his evil eye and renewed her speed.

At last the postoffice. Drusilla dashed across the street up the wide stone steps and reached the top as the frenzied goat clattered his hoofs on the bottom one. Drusilla was conscious that his familiar hands, warm and friendly, grasped her own and drew her to a place of safety behind a tall road shouldered figure—Gregory Ware. The goat bounded up the steps and slipped through the closing doors, his hoofs skating along the oiled floor; then he saw his reflection in the glass front of the tier of letter boxes and paused, staring, belligerent, besting angrily.

Some one laid a tentative hand on his back and was rewarded with a vicious lunge. Billy renewed his gaze in the glass. He pawed the floor angrily; he bleated once more, and then before the horrified onlookers could prevent him he bent his head and crashed violently into the glass front, shattering it in a thousand flying fragments and toppling the whole structure on to the startled postmistress and her assistant.

Fortunately nobody was hurt, not even Billy the goat. The glass front of letter box No. 13 was impaled on one horn, and on the other was a fancy embossed envelope that inclosed a valentine. Somehow, sublimed, he was captured by several citizens of Little River and tethered to the doorknob. Then one and all went forward to assist in restoring order in the chaos of mail matter.

Drusilla, pale and frightened, still hovered in the corner into which Gregory Ware had thrust her and which he had left without a word to help clear up the wreckage. Fanny Bicknell, the sharp-faced, sandy-haired little postmistress, pointed a skinny finger at Drusilla, while her little dark eyes flashed resentfully.

"I declare, Drusilla Fowler, ain't you got any better sense than to tag that goat of the Franklins into the postoffice? I expect the government will get after you. You've broken all the rules of the office. It says no dogs allowed inside, and that means goats and such. I thought you didn't take no stock in the Franklins' goat."

"I don't," retorted Drusilla, with spirit. "He chased me all the way down here. He's the lame of my life. You can look to Mr. Franklin for damages."

"I shall," said Miss Bicknell acidly, and then, addressing the men who were picking up glass preparatory to raising the fallen section of boxes, she added: "What you men fussing over there? Remember that's all government mail matter you're handling."

"Picking some of those letters out of the dirt under your boxes, Miss Fanny," said Gregory Ware grimly. "I should recommend that you have something done about your boxes. The whole thing is cracked and warped, and the mail box is full of cracks. Look under here where it stood!" He pointed to a square dust-outlet space on the floor where several yellowed and dirty missives were mingled with bits of dirt and splintered glass. "You're the postmistress, Miss Fanny. You'd better see what these letters are doing underneath the mailing box."

He stood back while the fussy little woman came forward and picked the letters out of the accumulated soil. She scanned them closely—there were three in all—and then she looked hesitatingly around the office.

"These must have slipped through the crack in the mailing box," she said after awhile. "Here's a bill from Fryer & Kermit for Anson Rogell. Come to think of it, Anson's dead this five years, and Fryer & Kermit went bankrupt anyway, so there's no harm done there!" And here's a postal card for Mrs. Beebe, saying that Burns & Co. ain't got the sample of blue cloth she asked for, and, land, it's dated two years back, so that don't make no matter either, because Mrs. Beebe's wearing black now anyway.

And—here's a letter for—mercy me, are you there, Drusilla Fowler? Here, Gregory, give that letter to Drusilla while I boss these men." She thrust a yellowed embossed envelope into Gregory's hand and turned away.

He came toward Drusilla, his eyes fixed on the missive in his hand, his face white beneath its coat of tan. When he spoke his voice was thick with emotion.

"Drusilla, here's a letter Miss Fanny just found under the mailing box. Like as not it's been there all this last ten years, ever since I mailed it one night before Valentine's day. I never understood why you never answered it," he said with slow emphasis as she took the letter from him. "Now I know, but I suppose it's too late."

She opened the missive with shaking fingers and drew from within a "lacy and dainty valentine. Wreath of roses and forget-me-nots surrounded two loving hearts, and underneath was a printed verse that was heavily underscored in ink:

While I protest my heart is thine
I would inquire if thine is mine.
If this be true, may I kiss a sign."

And the name of Gregory Ware was signed to it, and the date was ten years ago! Drusilla stared at it until all the coldness had fled from her eyes and a great tenderness invaded her face. Ashamed to lift her betraying glance to his serious inquiring one, she pressed the valentine with unconscious grace to her breast.

"Oh, this ought to have come before—it ought to have come before!" she cried passionately.

"Is it too late now, Drusilla?" asked Gregory softly. "It's never too late to be happy—if you want to be," he suggested.

"I want to be," sighed Drusilla contentedly, and then later she added, "Who would have thought that goat of the Franklins would prove a blessing in disguise?"

Little River folk watched agape, and nobody but those two understood why Gregory Ware and Drusilla Fowler led the Franklins' pet goat home with such solicitude or why Gregory bought it afterward and changed its name to Valentine.

"It can prove in the south meadow. He'll make a nice playmate for some body—some day," he added vaguely.

The Ruling Spirit.
Sitting at a cafe in Paris one evening, I heard a woman's idea of way. An affectionate young couple were passionately making love over some baroque chocolate. The girl was telling matters all manner of pretty things that ran something like this: "What a pity there will be no war after all! You would have been wounded, and I should have gone out to nurse you in such a pretty costume of diaphanities!"—London Black and White.

Richter's Criticism.
On one occasion Hans Richter was present at a concert given by a brother composer at which the latter performed a long and not particularly interesting work of his own. When the composition came to an end Richter expressed his criticism in a very few words. "Well," he said, "I too, have written compositions to make a pile so high," raising his hand three feet from the ground, "but I have burned them!"

Irony For Sarcasm.
The Actress (disdainfully)—Twenty dollars a week! Why, whom do you think you're trying to engage? Manager (of bush repertoire company)—Why—er—I beg your pardon, madam, but which New York theater is named after you?—Pack.

Sure Sign.
"Do you think they're engaged?" "I think so. They're giving a family party tomorrow night so that all the relatives can meet him."—Detroit Free Press.

Would Be Prepared.
She—Suppose, dear, I find you have not given me enough money? He—Then telegraph for more. She—Have you a telegraph blank?—Exchange.

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